

SERIAL STORY

The Sable Lorch

BY Horace Hazeltine

Robert Cameron, handsome, somewhat thin, Clyde, newspaper publisher, regarding anonymous investigation letters he has received. The first promises a glimpse of the woman's power on a certain day. On that day the head is mysteriously cut from a portrait of Cameron while the artist is in the room. While standing Cameron in the dressing room a Neil Grayson, former is mysteriously snatched. Cameron becomes nervous as a result of the shock. The third letter appears mysteriously on Cameron's desk. It makes Clyde aware of the life of Cameron. Clyde tells Cameron the story of his empty life. He tells Cameron everything and plans to take Cameron on a vacation trip. The yacht picks up a Chinese man found floating helplessly in a boat. He gives the name of Johnston. Cameron, deeply moved, tells him that he is a doctor. A Chinese search is made for a minute boat used by the captain just before Cameron disappeared. Johnston is allowed to go after being closely questioned. Evelyn takes the letters to an expert in Chinese literature, who pronounces them of Chinese origin. Clyde seeks assistance from a Chinese fellow college student, who recognizes him as Yip Sing, vice president of Chinatown in New York. Clyde goes to meet Yip Sing, who Johnston attempts to follow him. He falls into a basement, sprains his ankle and becomes unconscious. Clyde is found by Miss Grayson, a missionary among the Chinese. He is now several days as a result of his fall. Johnston is a Chinese man, who renders a personal emergency assistance. Murphy is determined to have Johnston's relations with the Chinese. Miss Clement promises to get information about Cameron. She is in Crystal Consolidated, of which Cameron is the head. It is caused by a rumor of Cameron's illness. Clyde finds Cameron on Fifth Avenue in a faded and emaciated condition and takes him home. Cameron awakes from a long sleep and speaks in a strange tongue. Evelyn declares the man is not her uncle. Evelyn and Clyde call on Miss Clement for prompt information and find that the Chinese man who was in Yip Sing's boat was murdered. Miss Clement gives Clyde a note asking him to read it after he leaves the mission and then destroy it. It tells of the abduction of a white man by Chinese, who escaped to China. The man is supposed to be the owner of "Sable Lorch," in which Mr. Cameron was killed. The appearance in New York of the man they supposed they had shipped to China, drives Cameron and Johnston to the Chinese. The suggestion in which Clyde and Evelyn are willing to help up by an armed man. Clyde is seized by Murphy and kept prisoner. Evelyn and Clyde are rescued by the police and return home. They find Yip Sing and the Chinese agent awaiting them. Yip tells Clyde the story of the crime of the "Sable Lorch," in which Mr. Cameron was deliberately sent to their death by one Donald McNish, whom they declare is Cameron. They declare that McNish can be identified by a tattoo mark on his arm. Clyde declares that Cameron has no such mark. The nurse is called in and describes a tattoo mark on his patient's arm. Clyde goes to investigate and finds the patient attempting to hide a letter. It is addressed to Donald McNish. The letter is from the man's mother in Scotland and identifies the patient as McNish.

CHAPTER XXV.—Continued.

"You mean," she began again, speaking very slowly now, as the mentally focused conditions, "that we must hold McNish as a hostage, and only give him up when they return Uncle Robert to us?"

"Exactly," I agreed. "Just as two armies do that are at war—exchange prisoners."

"Isn't there any other way?" she asked, frowning. "Oh, there must be. I don't care a straw you know, for that wicked man; but, Philip, think of his poor old mother!"

"I do think," I told her. "I've been thinking ever since I read her letter, and if it were possible, Evelyn, I'd give the reprobate his chance for her sake, little as he deserves it. But I've been thinking of Cameron, too. He may be somewhere on the high seas. As Miss Clement's note implied, or he may be a prisoner in some underground dungeon of Chinatown. Wherever he is, we are safe in concluding he is neither comfortable nor happy. Why, then, should we consider, to come right down to practicalities, this old Scotch mother of an infamous son, when the safety—the life even—of one we both love so dearly may at this moment be at stake?"

I flattered myself there was no getting away from this argument. It seemed to me conclusive, but the letter had stirred the sentimental depths of the girl's nature, and she refused to yield without one last effort.

"I know, Philip, I appreciate every word of what you have said; but couldn't we find out what we want to know through Miss Clement? She must have a lot more information than she put in that little hurriedly written note. Or, couldn't O'Hara find out for us?"

Before I could answer her, Checkbeedy stood in the doorway.

"Dr. Massey has just come down, Mr. Clyde," he said, "and would you

spare him a moment in the reception room?"

I turned to Evelyn.

"Shall we have him in here?" I asked. And at her consent, Checkbeedy, a moment later, led the doctor to us—a very changed doctor, a very decidedly less cocksure doctor than I had encountered earlier that morning in his fifty-fourth street office.

Even in his bow to Evelyn I detected the shamefaced humiliation he was suffering.

"We take off our hats to your personality, Miss Grayson," he said, confirming my reading. "I had never thought such a modern real-life instance of Desires and Dubious possible."

"Then you admit," I asked, smiling.

"Candidly. There is no question. Yet I could have sworn yesterday that I was attending Mr. Cameron. It is the most remarkable resemblance I have ever seen."

Evelyn asked him to be seated and I drew out a chair for him.

"And how do you find the patient?" I inquired, when he had sat down.

"Quite normal in every respect save one. He is in a highly nervous state. He is endeavoring to maintain the fiction that he is the gentleman we supposed he was. He evidently learned his lesson from Mr. Bryan, before we suspected anything. It is really wonderful how well he does it, considering that he has never seen the man he is trying to impersonate."

"But he must know that he has been discovered. He certainly knows I have this letter."

"A desperate man will battle against the most overwhelming odds," Dr. Massey observed, "and he is a desperate man."

"You gave no sign that you knew?" Evelyn asked.

"Not the slightest. I pretended that I believed him Mr. Cameron."

"But Mr. Bryan said he—"

"On the contrary," said the doctor. "Mr. Bryan knows him only as the Mr. Cameron he has nursed from the first. He would be the last man to indicate to his patient a knowledge of anything untoward."

"Miss Grayson and I were just discussing a course of action when you arrived, Doctor," I explained, "but had reached no conclusion. Last night I arranged with Yip Sing, who is probably the most prominent and best educated Chinaman in New York, and his friend the Chinese Vice Consul to meet me here today at noon. The chances are they will bring a United States deputy marshal with them, with a warrant for McNish's arrest. Now if we give him up, what will be the result? He will still maintain that he is Cameron in spite of our knowledge to the contrary. Yip Sing and his clan will insist that he is right and that we are wrong, and our chances of finding Cameron will dwindle. It isn't reasonable to expect that those engaged in the abduction plot will confess to their error and inform us as to Cameron's place of detention, is it?"

Dr. Massey knitted his brow behind the bow of his glasses and pursed his thin lips.

"We are certainly confronted by a very trying complication," he admitted with characteristic gravity.

"Miss Grayson has suggested that we send McNish abroad—at once, on a steamer sailing this morning."

"Mr. Bryan could go with him," Evelyn volunteered.

"If the United States authorities have a warrant for him," the physician argued, "that would only delay matters. They would arrest him on landing."

There was no question as to the accuracy of this deduction.

"And the newspapers," I added, "would be sure to publish columns of speculation. . . . If we could only write an admission from McNish it would simplify matters."

"Isn't there some one you could confront him with?" Dr. Massey asked, and hope rose within me at the suggestion.

"As far as I can make out, from what O'Hara tells me," was my rejoinder, "the police have in custody now the Eurasian cook who, I believe, has been McNish's Nemesis these sixteen years. If we could bring those two miscreants face to face, McNish would be sure to betray himself."

"Then arrange it, by all means," urged the doctor.

"Have McNish taken there, you mean?"

"Or have the Eurasian brought here."

And so, ultimately through the offices of O'Hara, who all this time had been awaiting me in the tonneau of my car which still stood at the door, John Soy, accompanied by two plain clothes men from the Detective Bureau, was brought from the Tombs to that sumptuous home on upper Fifth Avenue.

I say "ultimately" because his coming was delayed beyond all patience. Hour after hour passed. The morning dragged by with periodic telephone excuses from O'Hara. The hearing was in progress before the police magistrate. . . . Soy had been held for the grand jury. . . . The magistrate would have to sign a permit and he could not be approached until

he came off the bench. . . . Soy had gone to the Tombs. . . . The warden was at luncheon and could not be seen for half an hour.

Meanwhile Dr. Massey, impelled by the necessities of his practice, had departed, and Yip Sing and the vice consul, Chen Mok, had arrived and been relegated to the reception room. To my relief, Checkbeedy reported that they were unaccompanied. Meanwhile, too, Evelyn had received a call from Miss Clement and had learned with some dismay that the missionary's ill-fated informant had left with her no more definite information regarding Cameron's transportation than that which she had already conveyed to us.

"We're just starting in a taxicab," came at length from O'Hara over the wire. "We'll be there in less than half an hour."

And in less than half an hour they came, an ignoble, vulgar quartette against a stately, pompous background.

I met them in the great hall, standing before the broad, sculptured chimney-piece.

The three detectives were more or less of a phlegm—gross, coarse, red-faced men whose hands and feet seemed out of all proportion to their size, bulky as it was. Of the three O'Hara, possibly because of familiarity, struck me as the least offensive. But after all it was not the detectives who alarmed and held my chief interest, but the shrunken, shadow-like creature they had in charge, whom I recognized instantly as the supposed castaway the Shyella had picked up that warm October day somewhere east of Nantucket—the sinking figure I had followed through the press of Doyers street almost to my death.

My conjecture was thus in part verified: John Soy and Peter Johnson were the same, and it only remained now to prove that the rest of my guess was as well founded.

Stepping to the door of the reception room, I made brief apology for my detention and bade my two Catholic visitors join the others.

"I think Mr. Yip," I observed, "that we have here the Eurasian cook of the Sable Lorch about whom you told me."

I suppose I was foolish enough to fancy that the merchant would at once make the identification I desired. I should have known better. In substance we are no match for the ancient race to which Yip Sing belonged, as was evidenced by the absolute imperturbability of his manner, as, after glancing sharply at John Soy, he turned to me with a visage as blank as the marble wall, and in a voice without a shade of inflection, said:

"I do not know him. I have never seen him until now."

Had a white man dared to make such denial, I should have laughed in his face. But the dignity of the Oriental, the perfect aplomb of his manner, including an utter absence of all that could be construed as feigning, forbade such rejoinder; yet I knew that he had lied.

"Come, gentlemen," I said, denying myself even the satisfaction of a shoulder shrug, "and we shall decide whether the man upstairs is the villain you claim he is, or—" but I was in no mood to finish the sentence.

The seven of us, crowding into the elevator, were lifted to the floor above, where I preceded the others to the door of what we were wont to call Cameron's bedchamber. There I paused.

"Pardon me just a moment," I begged, with my hand on the knob, "until I see whether everything is ready."

I had instructed Mr. Bryan to have McNish up and dressed, and I wished to make sure that these preparations were completed. But I was hardly prepared for the scene which greeted my entrance.

McNish, clothed in the suit he had worn when I found him, was in the act of closing a drawer of an old-fashioned rosewood secretary which occupied a place against the right wall, beneath one of the medallioned windows. And the nurse was nowhere in sight.

Startled by the sound of the opening door, the trespasser half turned, his hands still on the brass drawer handles; then, at sight of me, he wheeled completely and stood defiant with his back to the antique desk.

"What are you doing there?" I cried, indignantly. "What were you looking for?"

Even before he spoke I saw the look of cunning come into his small, furtive eyes.

"I was looking for some papers of mine, Clyde," he answered, boldly, and his voice was so like Cameron's that, for just a moment, a shuddering uncertainty assailed me. Only the crafty leer weighed for the truth.

"Papers of yours?" I snarled, ignoring his familiar use of my name. "I have the only paper you brought into this house, Donald McNish, and that's evidence enough to put you where you belong. Where's Mr. Bryan?"

But at that moment the nurse, appearing from the adjoining room, answered for himself, and McNish, with a capably assumed nonchalance, said, smilingly,

"I didn't think you could be so easily imposed upon, Clyde. The letter

to Donald McNish was given to me by McNish himself. He wanted me to answer it. It was his last request. He—"

"Silence!" I cried; and then, "Mr. Bryan, get him into that chair before the bureau, facing the door. These people outside must not be kept waiting any longer." With which I turned, and with hand on knob once more, paused until the nurse had rather roughly, but in all haste, dragged his charge across the floor and fairly flung him into the indicated seat.

It was not until after the immediately succeeding occurrences that I learned from O'Hara what had been said to John Soy on his way up town in the taxicab. As I understand it, the other detectives had informed him that he was being taken to this house so that his chief accuser, who was high unto death, could make an antemortem identification. As a matter of fact, of course, the situation was practically the reverse: We desired Soy to identify McNish, and McNish, under stress of the encounter, to admit his own identity. The Eurasian, however, having been thus misinformed, was at a distinct disadvantage. So, when I drew back the door, and he was pushed forward into the room, instead of seeking, he imagined himself sought, and with bowed head and eyes on the floor, stood shiveringly ill at ease.

To this misunderstanding is probably attributable all that followed. Had Soy known that McNish was regarded, equally with himself, as an aggressor, he might have controlled his outbreak and permitted the law to wreak its tardy justice. But Soy did not know, and the tide of events met sudden change.

It is, indeed, scarcely conceivable, how rapidly it was all enacted. For just a moment the weakened figure stood still, while behind him crowded the rest of us—the three detectives, the two Chinamen and myself.

I saw McNish struggle for an instant to maintain his pose of indifference, and then I saw his cheeks blanch, and his little eyes widen in craven terror as he recognized the shabby, silent thing before him. His lips parted, his bared teeth clicked together, and his hands, like talons, clutched tensely his chair arms.

In that strained moment the room was strangely hushed. I know I scarcely breathed, as nervously intent I watched those two miserable creatures; the one keenly conscious, the other blind to everything save the rug pattern at his feet.

Then, like a flash, Soy stole a glance at his supposed accuser, and I saw him quiver into steel. It was as though an electric bolt had shot through his shrinking frame and limp limbs. He seemed to grow out of himself, to rise inches taller, towering with stiffened neck and lifted head.

To describe with any degree of accuracy what ensued, I cannot. I know only that McNish rose cumbrously to his feet, only to fall back again beneath the pouncing spring of the Eurasian. Then followed a pistol shot, muffled, yet sounding lethally loud against the grim silence of the chamber; and, as with one accord we leaped forward, I saw Soy roll over in a spasm of contortions, and McNish, thus freed from his gripping hold, raise an arm and fire again, with the pistol pressed to his own temple, just as Bryan, who had been nearest to them, bravely made a grab for the weapon.

CHAPTER XXVI.

His Sister Confessor.

The death of McNish was instantaneous. Soy, with a bullet in his abdomen, lingered for three days. During that time Miss Clement became his sister confessor, and so there drifted into our possession a host of facts which otherwise we might never have learned. Strange, uncanny creature that he was, he seemed to repose the utmost confidence in the gray, sweet-faced missionary, and fairly unburdened his sin-charged soul to her. Those of his fellow conspirators that she promised to protect, she protected. Those that he believed to have played him false, she protected likewise. Her religion was one in which personal justice has no dwelling. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," her Lord had admonished, and to him she was content to resign the problem of retribution.

Had I been more familiar with the Cameron town house and the town habits of its master, justice probably would not have been tricked out of having her way with two as lawless wretches as ever infested a community. I should have known then that one of the drawers of that quaint old rosewood secretary was the hiding place of a .38-caliber Colt, and in all likelihood had it removed before McNish was capable of searching for it. As it was, Mr. Bryan took no little blame upon himself for not having been the first to discover it, though to my mind he could hardly be regarded as recreant in failing to investigate a piece of furniture of so intimate a character.

The notoriety consequent upon the murder and suicide was hideously inordinate. Inspired and stimulated by the sensational press, which did not hesitate to imply what it dared not state openly, the currency of falsehood and misconception at one period

came close to being disastrous. As I had foreseen, the resemblance of McNish to Cameron, coupled with the seemingly convincing fact that the tragedy had occurred in the Cameron town house, where the millionaire was supposed to be convalescent, gave excuse for persistent iteration of a rumor that, in order to preserve the fame of a man regarded as above reproach and at the same time to protect the line of securities in which he had been interested, the story of a confusing likeness had been invented.

No paper in the land would have had the temerity to print this as a fact, but again and again—silly and impossible as it must have appeared to all thinking persons—it was promulgated by innuendo and embodied in more or less veiled worded denials.

As a result Crystal Consolidated suffered. Bonds and stocks alike sloughed fraction after fraction and point after point. And our mouths were necessarily closed upon the truth, since that, if possible, would have been even more damaging; for while we still hoped, we could give no positive assurance that Cameron was yet alive.

Strangely enough, though the whole wretched complication had been raked reportorially with a fine-tooth comb, the kidnapping from the yacht had not yet been so much as hinted at, but I lived, daily, in mortal dread that it would be brought to light at the next journalistic hand-sweep. Accurate information as to Cameron's present whereabouts was the news now most eagerly sought not alone by the press but by Wall street as well; our failure to supply it—though excused by us on the ground that in his present nervous condition, it was imperatively necessary to keep him sequestered from interviewers—was not unnaturally arousing a suspicion that we did not possess it to supply.

If, under the strain of the tragedy and the brutal publicity which followed upon it, Evelyn Grayson had not eventually succumbed she must have been more than human. Bravely she had borne up against a whelming succession of nerve-wrenching experiences, refusing to entertain fear and fighting valiantly against discouragement, but heart and nerves have their limit of endurance; and when, on the third day, John Soy was gathered to his yellow and white fathers, and a more yellow than white evening journal ventured, more boldly than had been dared hitherto, to make the implication to which I have referred, Evelyn collapsed utterly.

As chance would have it, I myself came upon her, lying white, limp, and unconscious on the library floor, with the paper still loosely held in her right hand. The sound of her fall had carried to me faintly as I neared the closed door, and a mingling born of intuition rather than of any more definite cause had hastened my steps.

Having lifted her to a couch and rung for her maid I at once set about doing what I could to restore her to consciousness. But her plight was no ordinary momentary faintness. Stubbornly she refused to respond to my efforts, and those of the maid when, after hours it seemed, she came, were equally unavailing.

Alarmed, I called up Dr. Massey, only to learn that he had gone to Boston for a consultation, and that Dr. Thorne, his assistant, was operating at Roosevelt Hospital. For a moment, distressed and anxious, the names of other physicians eluded me. In despair, I opened the Telephone Directory, in hope of a suggestion, and the name of Addison leaped at me from the page. To my infinite relief he was in his office; his electric was at the door, and he would be over at once.

And it was not until ten minutes later, when he came hurriedly into the room, that I remembered. The name, when I saw it, had at once struck me as familiar. I seemed to know, even, that it belonged to a physician of reputed high standing, yet it was only at the instant of his entrance, when his penetrating steel-gray eyes drilled into mine, that I associated it with the man to whom I had gone, not for any ailment, but to learn whether my friend, in spite of his denials, had ever been in China.

If the recognition was mutual, Dr. Addison gave no sign of it. His patient demanded and received his immediate attention. Hastily he administered a stimulating hypodermic, and then, himself assisted in carrying her to her room.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Snake Serum Ordered.

It is reported in the *Lancet* that the chief medical officer of one of the Austrian army corps has recently ordered the use of Calmette's serum against serpent bites, and a fairly large stock of it has now been issued to each regiment in the south of the empire. The men and the medical officers are instructed in the use of it, and regular inspections of the stock, as well as lectures on the natural history of the poisonous kinds of serpents, are provided for. In addition to the serum, the various appliances necessary for its proper application have been supplied to the army hospitals. Hitherto much dependence has been placed on the treatment of such injuries by alcohol and the application of permanganate of potash.